



*A Critique of
Canadian Writers*

By Prof. L. E. HORNING, Ph.D.



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ACTA VICTORIANA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Canadian Literature of 1898 - - -	PROF. L. E. HORNING. 107
Plus Ultra (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	FRANK L. POLLOCK. 124
Stone Breaking (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT. 126
Review of Recent Fiction - - -	PROF. J. B. REYNOLDS. 127
The Minstrel (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN. 139
The Wind (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	THEODORE RAND. 142
Historical Fiction - - -	GOLDWIN SMITH. 143
Daulac: A Tragedy. Act V. - - -	W. WILFRED CAMPBELL. 145
The Future (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	JOHN READE. 152
Ethics of Art and History - - -	J. W. L. FORSTER. 153
Spirits of Air (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	ANNIE CAMPBELL HUESTIS. 160
The Home Coming (<i>Story</i>) - - -	JEAN BLEWETT. 161
The Snow-Drop (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS. 165
Literature and Canadian Writers - - -	HON. G. W. ROSS. 167
The White Door (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	ETHELWYN WETHERALD. 169
Brown Witch and Black Abbé (<i>Story</i>) - - -	CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS. 170
The Widow of Nain (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	HON. DAVID MILLS. 178
A Magazine Chat - - -	R. H. JOHNSTON. 180
When the Gulls Come in (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	HELEN MERRILL. 182
A Lesson in Geography - - -	PROF. A. KIRSCHMANN. 183
To a Bereaved Friend (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	J. W. BENGOUGH. 220
Replies to Questions - - -	222
SIR J. G. BOURINOT, K.C.M.G., GEO. R. PARKIN, C.M.G., LL.D., CHANCELLOR BURWASH, HON. G. E. FOSTER, PRINCIPAL GRANT,	
Tennyson's "Holy Grail" - - -	PROF. WM. CLARK. 228
Ode to a Christmas Music (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	W. T. ALLISON. 240
A Helpful Poem - - -	J. W. CHARLESWORTH. 242
To One Disappointed in Love (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	BERNARD McEVROY. 243
Editorial - - -	248
Personals and Exchanges - - -	252
Locals - - -	261
Athletics - - -	266
Life's Quest (<i>Poem</i>) - - -	S. A. MORGAN. 268

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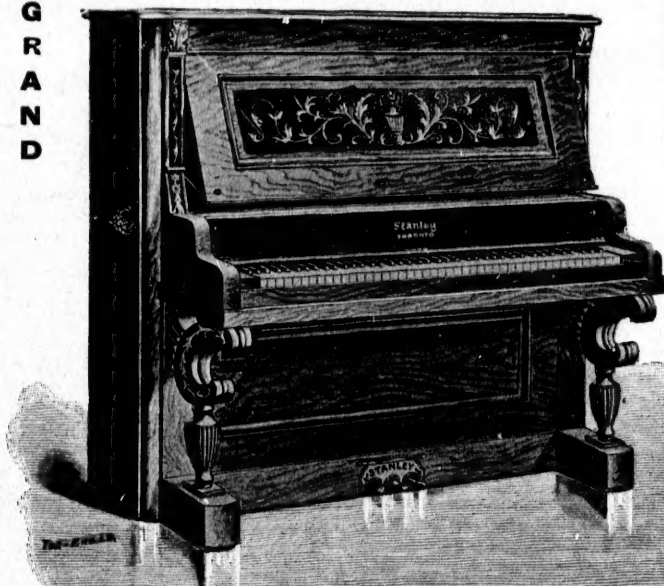
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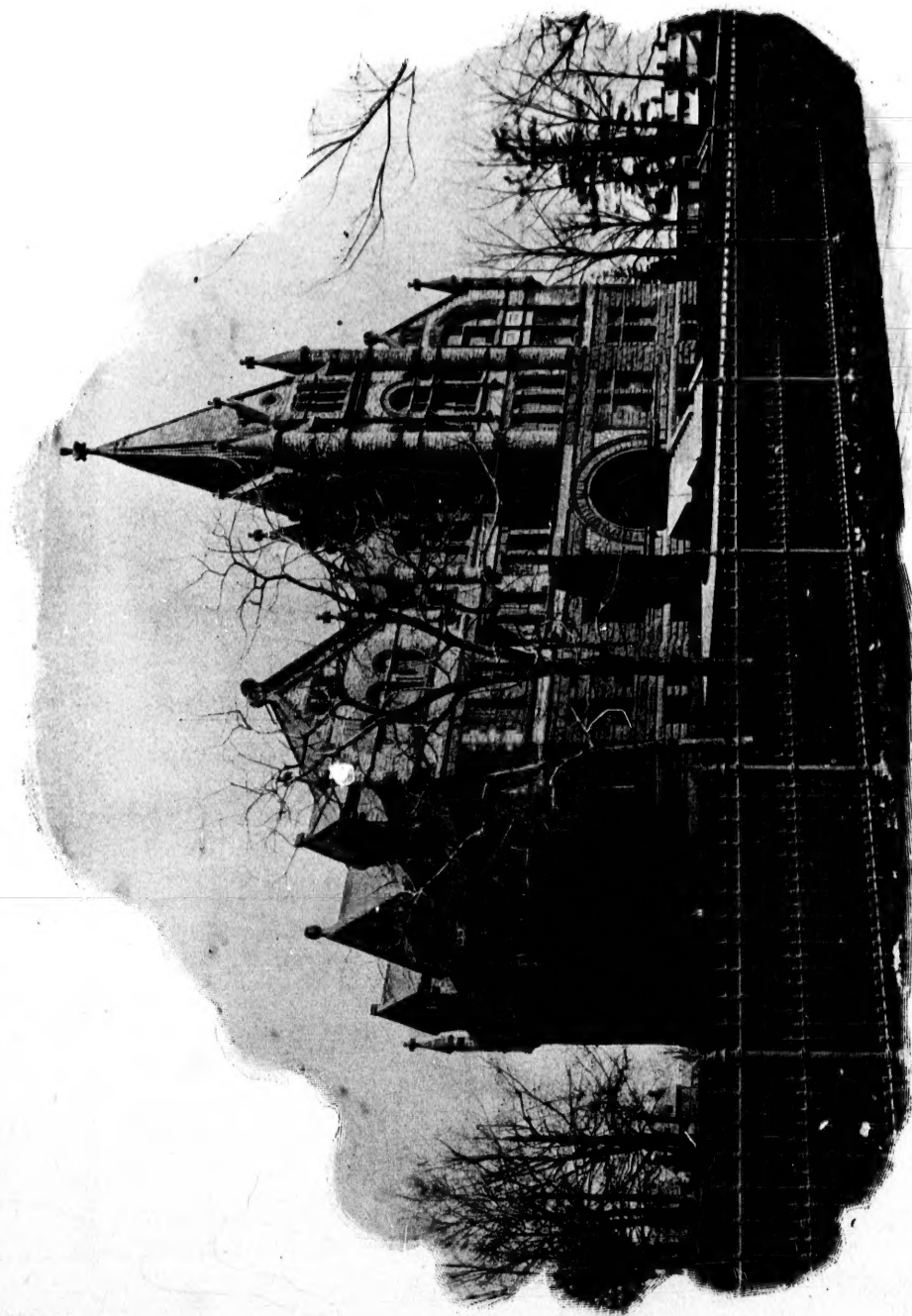
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VOL. XXII. TORONTO, DECEMBER, 1898. No. 3.

CANADIAN LITERATURE OF 1898.



A Critique of Canadian Writers

By Prof. L. E. HORNING, Ph.D.

Gilbert Parker,
Ralph Connor,
Seranus,
Marshall Saunders,
J. W. Longley,
Bliss Carman, Joanna E. Wood,
Charles G. D. Roberts,
Rev. E. H. Dewart, D.D.,
Dorothy Knight,
Blanche L. Macdonell,
Etc., etc.



QUITE recently there was presented to this University a unique collection of Anglo-Canadian poetry. Our best thanks are deservedly due the gentleman who so kindly gave it, and who had been so painstaking in its collection. But when the books were placed in my private office, to be catalogued, I can hardly describe the sense of disappointment which came over me when I looked at the two hundred or more volumes, filling only three short shelves, knowing that so much of it all does not repay reading. Was this the English portion of the Canadian literature we have heard so much about in these latter days? Not that I want five hundred volumes or more. The whole literature of Greece can be put on one shelf, and Pindar does not take up any more room than MacIntyre. Compare Pindar and MacIntyre? O ye Muses! Surely I can do something better

with my time than pore over so much worthless stuff when, in this busy world, so little time can be snatched to read the best literature which will delight and has always delighted the best minds of all ages and nations. The literature of Greece alone has had a most tremendous influence on the world. True, some reader may reply, but this has been saved from a greater mass, and your comparison is therefore unfair. My answer is, "Would that such a fate would overtake the larger mass of what is now written, whether English, foreign or Canadian!"

But how was this great literature of Greece produced? Assuredly not at the same rate nor in the same way as so much of the modern. But our information on methods of production among the Greeks is necessarily meagre, and we must put some of the moderns on the stand. Take, for instance, Goethe. We know that the creative impulse was strong in him, in 1771, when he produced "Goetz von Berlichingen." But though a powerful drama and full of Shakespearian traits, it did not then see light through the medium of the press. His mentor and critic, Herder, plainly told him that Shakespeare had spoiled him, so it went back into the crucible, and two years later was given to the world purged of a good deal of its dross. Take his "Iphigenie," in its four known forms, each representing years of thought and labor. Especially in his "Faust" we have the greatest monument in any literature to the length of time and depth of thought and revising care put upon his work by any known author. But let us come nearer home. Those who have seen the manuscript of Dickens' "Christmas Carol" will at once say, "How many changes! Surely they were not all necessary!" But the author evidently thought so. Probably all of us have read the story which recently went the rounds of the press, that Kipling had thrown that wonderful poem of his, "Recessional," into the wastepaper basket, from which grave it was so fortunately rescued by his wife.

It is indeed quality that tells, and quality is not found in the works of an Annie S. Swan or an E. P. Roe, than whom no author enjoyed a greater popularity among a large class of readers in the days of my boyhood. Marion Crawford is another case in point. The promise of his earlier works is not fulfilled in his later ones, because he composes too rapidly, and does not give enough care to his characters, plots and style. Quality is found in the works of those who toil and moil, who recast and mould, mould and recast, until something beautiful comes out of the furnace. A work of literature must represent the life of its maker, for unless it does—unless the

maker have a message to tell—he can lay no claim to the title of *vates* or seer, which the ancients considered a necessary office of the poet.

It is rather difficult to define what is meant by message. Pleasure all works of literature must give, and some say that *that* is the real aim of true literature. But this is too narrow a conception, unless that pleasure produces some thought which tends to the elevation of the ideals of life in the reader or hearer.



W. A. FRASER.

That the maker of a work of literature have a message is a necessary requirement, but an equally important requisite is that this message be delivered in proper form. Browning fails, mainly because he paid too little attention to form, while, on the other hand, the devotees of art for art's sake go to the other extreme. Now, it will not do to excuse crudeness in work by an apology for the youth of the author, or by inveighing against criticism, whether latter-day or old-time. How many of the present day authors would willingly pass through the severe apprenticeship of seven years, which Guy de Maupassant is said to have served under his master Flaubert? Seven years, and everything produced in that time was destroyed. But Maupassant stands out as the prince of story-tellers. And just here let me say, that it seems to me a pity to see so many of the youthful attempts, of even renowned authors, reprinted and sown broadcast over the land. These "sins of youth," as they may properly be designated, add nothing to the fame of the author, though an acquaintance with them may form a necessary step in the study of his evolution. On the other hand, nothing would be lost to the world were these, and many more, buried in oblivion. We might then hope to compass some of the really good literature there is in the world.

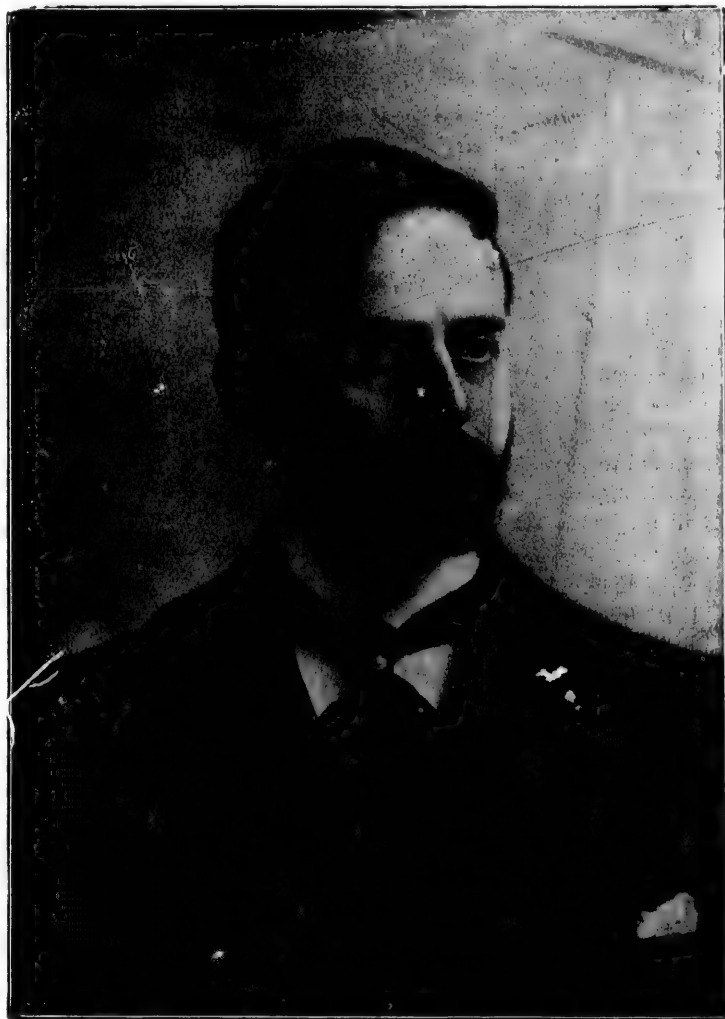
I have elsewhere made mention of the crying need for criticism in Canada. It is a pleasant duty to note that our chief magazine is doing something along this line. But I think that when *The Canadian Magazine* has the battle so well-nigh won, the duty to hew to the line becomes all the more imperative. And yet I can well understand what plaintive petitions are made to editors and managers, which would all but melt a heart of stone, and there are publishers who want a *quid pro quo*, a good notice for a good advertisement. It, then, becomes almost imperative to pay a competent

critic, possessed of good judgment, a salary large enough to put him beyond any financial worry and give him a free hand and good backing. As it is now, the so-called criticisms or reviews in our papers and magazines are absolutely worthless as a guide to the merits of any particular book. This applies not only to Canadian but to American and all other papers and periodicals, to a greater or less degree, as, for instance, to the review in the *New York Herald* of the works of a professor in a Western university, which attributed Freytag's "Rittmeister von Alt-Rosen" to the Professor, with the information that he was considered by competent critics to have written even better than the German. Many other egregious blunders and indiscriminate puffing were in evidence throughout the article. The public has, therefore, a right, and a most just right, to complain of the ignorance of reviewers. If a distinction is ever to be made between criticism and advertisement, honest, capable critics must do the work. I am well aware of the hue and cry raised against latter-day criticism, part of which I believe to be justified, but by no means all. Criticism means passing judgment after weighing evidence, and presupposes in the judge a previous training. Who would think of elevating a hodcarrier to the bench in our courts of justice because those who are to be hailed before the tribunal do not want one versed in the law? Yet a good deal of the scorn hurled at latter-day criticism partakes of this nature.

One great difficulty which critics here in Canada have to contend against, is that there is just now a demand, in a certain sense a pseudo-demand, for a Canadian literature. What is a national literature? We may answer, one that reflects national characteristics. In what do these consist? The passion of love manifests itself in much the same way, whether the Romeo and Juliet be English or Greek, German or Chinese. There can be little difference in that. But the setting in which it may be found will differ in different countries, where the habits of thought, the climate and the perspective differ, and here is where we may, indeed must, look for national characteristics. And yet, this is after all an outward trappings, which must not be allowed to exceed certain well-defined limits. And so it is with the other passions and *motifs*. Here is where style and technique have their place, and hence our authors must be trained, and must always train themselves, that is, exercise relentless self-criticism.

Still another difficulty is a proper appreciation of what literature really is, and what is its true aim. Now, it is the height of folly to insist that all books are literature, unless we are willing to accept De

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*Yours very sincerely
Gilbert Parker.*

Quincey's definition and divide into two classes, *literature of power*, or literature proper, *i.e.*, the resultant efforts of imaginative creative genius, and *literature of knowledge*, that which has as its aim the addition to our store of knowledge, of fact. The former will give pleasure and, incidentally, profit; the latter profit and, incidentally, pleasure. Didactic, controversial and scientific works are not literature proper, but works of genius are, and belong alone to this class.

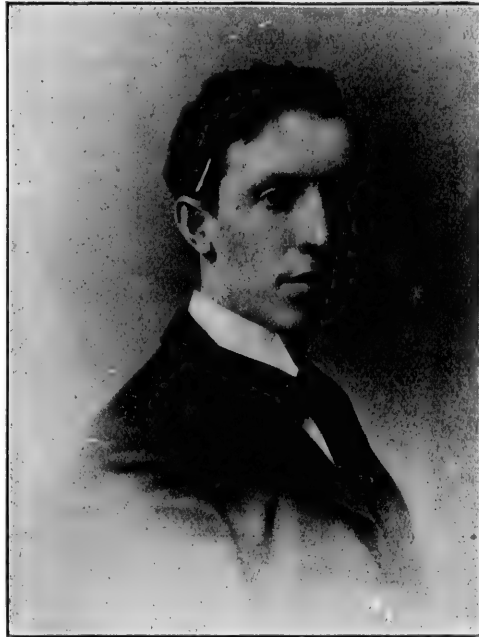
By what standard are we to judge a work of literature? Is every lyric poet to measure up to Tennyson, every dramatic writer to Shakespeare? That would be hard on most present day authors. But some critics go farther still, and compare with Horace and Virgil, with Sophocles, and Pindar, and Theocritus. Is that just? Is it not true that these older writers wrote for an *aristocracy* of readers, while we have to appeal to a *democracy*? In our modern levelling-up, do we not also level down, and must we not change our ideals and our criticism? No Grecian *washlady* had the latest production of a May Agnes Fleming open before her as she beat her master's linen white on the stones of the running brook. Literature has undoubtedly lost in the process of levelling-up, and, I fear, without a gain to match. But if we try another course recommended, and praise the good only in each author, whose judgment is to be trusted? Surely not that of a novice? Or must we carefully ascertain what each author is capable of and judge him by himself? What various judgments would then be passed! That plan is not adopted in any department of life that I know of—we hold our ideals higher.

But whatever standard the critic has to adopt, he has also to properly distinguish between the different divisions of true literature, such as drama, comedy, lyric poetry and the different classes of fiction. Too little is known, I fear, of the nature and essence of these different forms.

But some may now ask, Who is to train our critics and where are they to get their training? I have elsewhere said that the duty of providing this lies with our Universities. A Professorship of *Æsthetics* and allied subjects should be established, and all students in any literary department should be required to take some work in such department. With properly qualified and thoroughly sane teachers, there would go out from the different universities a body of students from year to year, who would, on filling their various positions in life, gradually but with ever-increasing influence, raise the standard of taste and culture, and make it impossible for anything but good literature to succeed, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Now, let us see how this all applies to the books of the year in Canada which lie before us. Of course it will be impossible, with the space at our disposal, to give anything like a minute analysis of each work, however profitable such an attempt might be.

The feature of the year has been the prominence of fiction, poetry for some reason or other sinking into the background.



DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT.

Gilbert Parker, our best Canadian writer, has in his last published book, *The Battle of the Strong* (Copp, Clark Co.), taken his subject from the Isle of Jersey, and the stirring times of the Revolution. The play of forces on the development of each character is well and skillfully wrought out, and finds a climax in the heroine, Guida Landresse. Her story is that of a beautiful girl with two lovers, the one playing her false when he thought she would be a drag to him in his ambitious schemes, while the other is the prince in disguise who comes to his rights at last and makes Guida happy. A simpler exposition and a

quicker plunge *in medias res* would have been to the advantage of the book. But it took even Shakespeare a long time to learn that.

Hypnotized? (Ontario Publishing Co.) is a story by a British Columbia journalist, Julian Durham, with the scene laid in England and the problem that of unconscious hypnotism. As this author has not, so far as I know, dealt with Canadian subjects, it will, perhaps, be better to wait until such a work from her pen appears.

Black Rock. To the Editor of the *Westminster* belongs the credit of having discovered the story-teller of the year, Ralph Connor. His book is a tale of mission work among the miners and lumbermen of British Columbia; of their struggle with the demon whiskey, and their victory under the leadership of the, I had almost said, sporting preacher, Craig, and his wonderfully endowed lieutenant, Mrs. Mavor, afterwards Mrs. Craig. The preacher is an honor graduate of Toronto University, and therefore it is no surprise to find frequent references to friendships formed there—and more especially to Rugby football, to which sport the hero is devoted. And there was need of all the pluck that is developed by the game, for the battles they had to fight were against a more insidious foe than ever tried their mettle on the campus. The characters all stand out clear and distinct, each playing well his part in the development of the story. It is not difficult to tell what school the author attended in learning his art, for the names Maclaren and Crockett come unbidden into the memory, and yet one is not made to feel that the author is a servile imitator. Individuality is everywhere in evidence in the work. Nor do the minor characters suffer at the hands of their creator. Graeme, the boss of the lumber camp; Connor, the wonder-working physician, whose unique prescription—a cablegram—was so potent in driving out mountain fever at the critical moment; Nelson, the victim of drink, who was rescued from his thralldom and closed a noble life by a death for his master; Billy, whose pathetic struggle against the common enemy is so beautifully told; and even Slavin, the reformed bartender, all and sundry enlist our attention from start to finish. Usually a story with the setting of this one is only secondarily of literary merit, and this still shows the earmarks of its origin, which was to interest the readers in missionary work among the workers in the wild west. But Love is Lord of all, and gives a very human interest to all the actors in the drama. Throughout the work we are made conscious of the greater freedom which prevails in those wild districts to the breaking down of the narrow barriers of creeds and to the emphasizing of the universal in all our beliefs.

Taken all in all, it is a capital story which gives great promise of further good work on the part of the author, and his next work will be looked forward to with pleasure. But let him prune carefully, he is capable of the very best.

The Forest of Bourg-Marie, by Mrs. Harrison (Morang), is another of the good books of this year. The scene is laid in the Province of Quebec,



REV. C. W. GORDON ("Ralph Connor.")

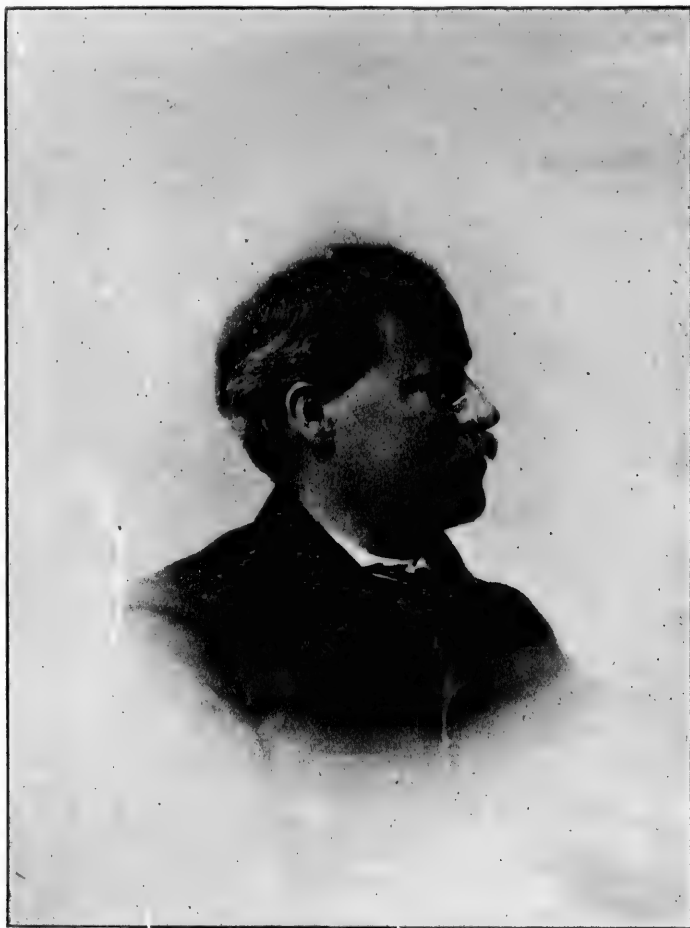
and the characters are the superstitious *habitants* of that province, which is so rich in legends and historical associations. There is the wonderful old trapper, Mikel le Caron, deeply learned in that intricate science of woodcraft, a dreamer, who hopes some day to see the manor, of which he is the lawful seigneur, restored to the glory it had in the seventeenth century. But the last scion of his race is Magloire, who ran away from him when about fourteen years of age, and, after

an absence of nine years, returns to show how greatly he has degenerated in Milwaukee, where he has been barber, pictureseller, coachman and what not, besides having lost all love for religion and his mother church, and has become a blatant orator on all socialistic topics. A third character which wins our sympathy is Nicolas Lauriere, the apt pupil of Mikel the trapper, and in his way a thinker. He is a lover of the woods and river, moved to his really poetic depths at the sight of a beautiful sunset. A hunchback, with the singularly unsuitable name of Pacifique, makes the fourth chief actor in the scenes. Minor parts are played by the *curé*, who was a true father to his people, Joncas, the trapper friend of Mikel, and several others who had been friends of Magloire in his youth. Strange to say, there are really no women in the story, for Magloire's mistress, Kitty, has a very subordinate part, and the two *Canadiennes* are barely mentioned. Mrs. Harrison possesses a thorough acquaintance with the life of the habitants whom she portrays, and in general her book reads well; but there are faults in the way of reflections and explanations which might have been avoided. Moreover, the whole chapter entitled "The Cure's Garden" is not necessary to the development of any of the characters and, therefore, might with advantage have been dispensed with. As a whole, however, the story is an excellent one and makes a very welcome addition to our Canadian literature.

Rose à Charlité (L. C. Page & Co.) by Marshall Saunders, author of *Beautiful Joe*, is a tale of Evangeline's land. It is a great improvement on her previous work, but might have been compressed a good deal without detriment to the story. The characters are fairly well drawn, but are scarcely instinct with life. This criticism may also be passed on *Judith Moore* (Ontario Publishing Co.), by Joanna E. Wood. This author's first story, *The Untempered Wind*, has more power than her second, the characters of which are rather effeminate. I cannot agree with the editor of *The Canadian Magazine* in ranking her with Gilbert Parker, but still I feel that she can do good work if she takes time.

Diane of Ville Marie: A Romance of French Canada, by Blanche L. Macdonell (Briggs), is the first longer work by a comparatively new writer. The scene is laid in Ville Marie, about 1690, at a time when attacks by Iroquois and English make the lives of the French settlers hazardous. Diane de Monestrol, a ward of Jacques Le Ber, finds herself in due time in love with young Du Chesne, who has lost his heart to Lydia Longloys, a beautiful English girl rescued from the Indians. Du Chesne loses his life in a battle against

the English, and Diane, marrying the Duke de Ronceval, returns to France to do pure and lovely deeds, buoyed up by her unconfessed but undying love for the unfortunate Du Chesne. The book is pure in



J. W. BENGOUGH.

tone (as are all that have been mentioned in this review), but there is nothing startling in the characters, though they are fairly well drawn. Diane is an exception, and stands out clearly before us. But in this

work, too, we miss that firm grasp of the material and skill in development of the plot, which is so necessary to the success of a story. The story seems long drawn out at the beginning. Then there is quite a decided tendency at "fine writing," a fault that seals the fate of many books. The opening paragraph is a very good example of this, and many other instances are found in the different chapters.

Turning from fiction, what do we find in poetry? In his work, *Essays for the Times* (Briggs), Dr. Dewart has collected the few poems which he has published at different times since 1869. When Dr. Dewart writes anything he has something to say, and we are glad to have these pieces preserved for us. It seems to me a pity that he does not do more in this direction, but under-production is far better than over-production.

Cuba, and Other Verse (Briggs), by Robert Manners, contains some very good work, but is uneven. The humorous poem on "The Early Worm of Unhappy Memory" is quite a success, and so is "His Reply to 'Her Letter.'" "Night" contains some fine descriptive stanzas:

Above yon looming cliff, whose sombre height,
Black 'gainst the sky, o'erlooks the slumbering sea,
Thou (*the moon*) soar'st aloft, dissolving into light
The waters, cradled to tranquility.

Mounting on high, soon doth thy radiance fill
The earth and sea—most welcome on the deep
Where thy bright beams with hope all wanderers thrill
Wao in the night across the ocean sweep.

Unfortunately other stanzas are weak, and the transition bad. The whole work is only fair.

Thayendanegra, an Historico-military Drama, by J. B. Mackenzie, is a work of duty to appease the shade of the neglected chief, Joseph Brant. The author is not a dramatist, and that makes one sorry for the poor shade. The dedication to Prof. Clark is the most surprising of all, incomprehensible. The book has not a single merit, unless it be the historical notes.

The Vision of the Seasons, and Other Verses, by Dorothy W. Knight (Drysdale), is a very plain case of the need of every poet being armed with a good-sized pruning-knife. Miss Knight rushed into print at *eleven* years of age. I am not acquainted with her previous booklets, but a good deal of the present one should never have seen

the light of day in the present form. For instance, here are the closing lines of "January":

"Now observe the windows and look at the delicate frostwork.
Thick on the large panes, but thinner and lighter on small ones,
Sometimes 'tis traced like leaves, and sometimes as stars or as landscapes
Now you see high mountains, and now a field or a footpath,
Drawn and outlined entire in the beautiful, wonderful frostwork.
This is a winter song, a picture of January's glory,
This describes the splendor of the beautiful January weather."

Minute description! Moderate prose! But here is something much better:

A MEMORY.

A slope of snow and a mild March day,
Some bare plum trees 'gainst a sky of gray,
And a happy child with her sled at play.

A wee brown bird on a dripping bough,
A song both simple and sweet, I trow,
And the child has stopped—she is listening now.

So clear, so plaintive, that little strain,
She longs and listens, it comes again,
She is thrilled with pleasure through every vein.

Now three years gone is that March sky's gray,
The wee brown birdie has flown away,
But the child's heart rings with the song to-day.

There is plenty of proof through the different poems that this young girl loves nature in its different forms, but in all kindness we would advise her to be very severe in self-criticism.

After this had been written, a letter was handed me, in which the encomiums of Roberts, Lighthall, Fréchette and others on Miss Knight's work were cited. I have no wish to be unduly severe on the young author, but I wonder how in all honesty such unstinted praise can be given. Praise the good, certainly, but point out the weaknesses as well. Do not spare the rod, else the child will most assuredly be spoiled.

What *dear* little books Lawson, Wolfe & Co. do put on the market! How Shakespeare and Chaucer must envy modern poets! And what a mellifluous versifier Bliss Carman is! *By the Aurelian Wall* is a book of elegies to Keats, Shelley, Blake, Stevenson and

others, including Paul Verlaine, with whom, doubtless to my everlasting damnation as a lover of literature, I have no sympathy. But what is to be expected from such a Philistine? And yet I know a poet, German 'tis true and not of small account, Goethe by name, who was a master in versification, but there is a world of meaning in his honey-sweet tones. Anyone acquainted with "Faust" will bear me out. What are we to make of this stanza from the opening elegy?



JOANNA E. WOOD.

"He learns the silver strain
Wherewith the ghostly houses of grey rain
And lonely valleys ring,
When the untroubled white throats make the spring
A world without a stain."

Lines two, four and five are the puzzles.

I have also a strong dislike to the sentiment in some of Carman's work. A striking example is the elegy "To Raphael," to which I must refer my readers. Now, there is no doubt that Bliss Carman is a gifted poet, but I must say that I do not think he is doing work

worthy of him or of his art. Protesting, methinks he doth protest too much, that the poet must be free, gives no right to license, and this, to my mind, is Carman's weakness. At any rate, no one with the full flow of life in his veins and full-fledged hopefulness in his breast can have any patience with decadence and squalor. And though we all know that a few of the "dear good people on familiar terms with God," as Carman puts it, are somewhat of a nuisance, yet no sane healthy nature can deny that the life and example of the Saviour of men influences to a greater or less degree the lives of almost all men who count for some thing in this world and who are doing something real for its good. . . . the dead women who

"Dares to make desire a duty,
With the heretics in hell!"

are no models for us, and are not accepted as such by any decent person.

Some fine work is found in Roberts' *New York Nocturnes*. Here is a little gem :

"Said Life to Art—"I love thee best
Not when I find in thee
My very face and form, expressed
With dull fidelity,

But when in thee my craving eyes
Behold continually
The mystery of my memories
And all I long to be.

How much the following lines say !

"IN DARKNESS.

I have faced life with courage,—but not now
O Infinite, in this darkness draw Thou near.
Wisdom alone I asked of thee, but Thou
Hast crushed me with the awful gift of fear."

Roberts is doing good work in both verse and prose, as witness his *Forge in the Forest*. But what about nationality? some reader may ask. Well, Carman and Roberts are Canadian-born and have treated Canadian subjects; but how are we to distinguish between English, Stateser and Canadian poets? We all speak, with very slight differences, the same tongue, and the growing cosmopolitanism, now so much in evidence, tends decidedly to the wiping out of minor differences in writings. Then how can we expect much difference?

The Lord of Lanoraie, a Canadian Legend, by Robert G. Starke (John Lovell & Son), is a very fair attempt to do for our country what Sir Walter Scott did for Scotland.

Camp and Lamp is a collection of stories and verse by Samuel N. Baylis (Drysdale), of various weight and merit.



WILLIAM WILFRED CAMPBELL.

Besides books of verse and works of fiction quite a number of other works, published during the present year, have been handed to me for review. I shall notice them only *en passant* with very brief words, seeing that this article is already long enough.

Dr. Dewart's *Essays for the Times* is a valuable collection. I do not know whether the author has any more essays in reserve, but I could wish that he would give us some more on Canadian

authors like the one on Sangster. He is the best qualified judge we have. "Confessions and Retractions of an Eminent Scientist" (Romanes) is a very striking essay and suggestive of thought. "Questionable Tendencies in Current Theological Thought" is well developed and will interest even if one should not agree with the author throughout. In fact, all are interesting, keen and instructive, but, personally, I should like to see some more on literary subjects and a division into two books.

Love, by Attorney-General Longley, of Nova Scotia (Copp, Clark Co.), is a dissertation on "The Greatest Thing in the World." There is much that is very excellent, but the author raises, especially in the chapter "What Love is Lawful?" and leaves unsettled, a good many puzzling questions. Repetitions are somewhat painfully frequent and seem to me a fault in style.

A Critical Study of In Memoriam, by Rev. Dr. King, of Winnipeg (Morang), would be a useful book to a beginner in the subject, but contributes nothing new for the more advanced student, nor could one dispense with other aids. The style is not felicitous, and the long sentence of the opening paragraph of the preface is a very fine example of what to avoid in writing.

A great many works are now appearing in the way of contributions to the social history of our country. They are valuable sidelights, but cannot be called history proper. Those before me are "Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement," by Egbert A. Owen (Briggs); "Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie," by McDougall (Briggs); "The Making of the Canadian West," by R. G. MacBeth (Briggs); "Steam Navigation," by James Croil (Briggs), a valuable contribution to the history of our waterways; and a book of very rambling, styleless sketches by Thomas Conant (Briggs). This last I have seen elsewhere. Perhaps the colored plates may suit the taste of the general public, but they do not seem to me to particularly enhance the value of the work. Canadian history, based on a study of the original authorities, has to a large extent yet to be written. Miss Young's "Stories of the Maple Land" (Copp, Clark Co.) is a selection from the stirring incidents in our history told attractively for children. Herbin's "Grand Pré" (Briggs) is an instructive guidebook to Evangeline's Land.

In conclusion let me say that this essay, undertaken at the urgent solicitation of the editors of "ACTA," does not claim to be a complete review of all Canadian works which have appeared during the year, nor does the writer profess to be infallible in his criticisms, which after

all are, as are all such, to a great extent a matter of personal opinion. But I cannot close without saying that I believe Canadians have been making rapid strides in literary production, and that we ought to look for and confidently expect better things in the near future.

D. Horning

Plus Ultra.

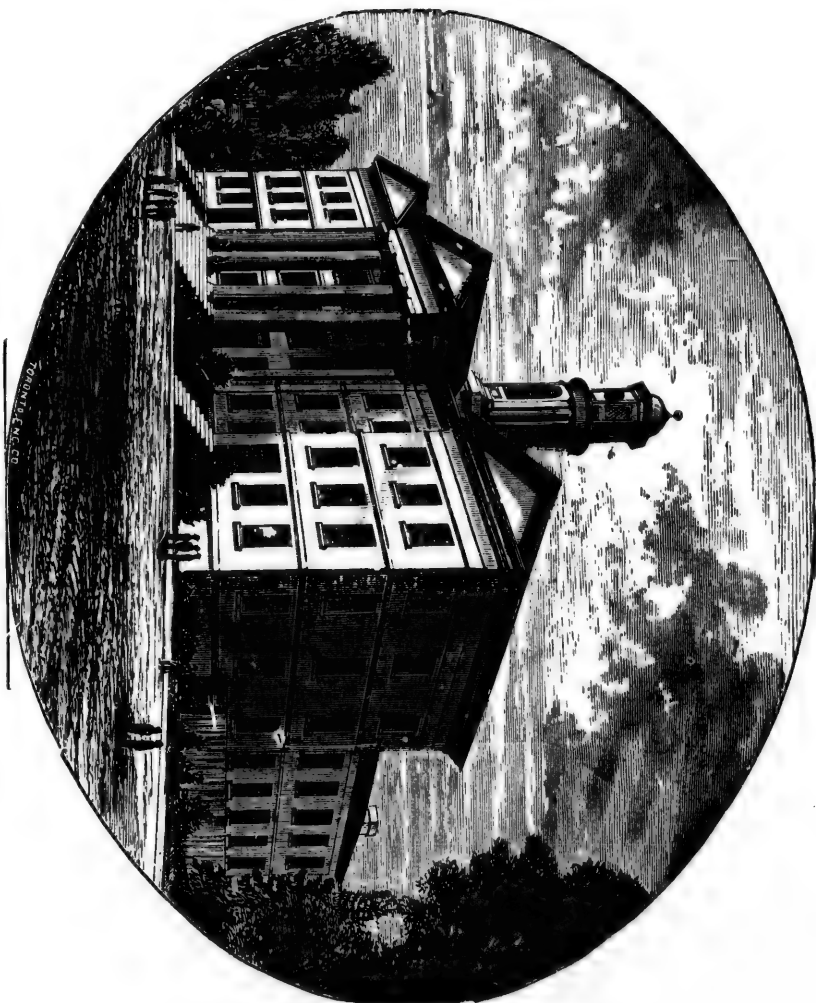
ONE more song and then away,
 Strive no more to gain her ear;
 One more prayer for Love to pray,
 Silence then and darkness drear.
 Light of Love through darkness brought,
 Sweetest smiles for her enwrought—
 She will neither see nor hear.

Little worth but for her sake
 Held I all that life might spare;
 All my art I strove to make
 As a garland for her hair.
 Life and Love and Art together
 Pass like leaves in wintry weather—
 Neither takes she thought nor care.

No more Love and no more song!
 What is left for Life to say?
 This: When sombre hours grow long,
 Memory's lamp shall light thy way.
 Love in dreams can know no waning;
 Seldom Love survives the gaining;
 Touched,—it withers to decay.

Frank L. Paddock

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"Old Vic," COBOURG

Stone Breaking.

MARCH wind rough
Clashed the trees,
Flung the snow ;
Breaking stones,
In the cold,
Germans slow,
Toiled and toiled ;
Arrowy sun
Glanced and sprang,
One right blithe
German sang
Songs of home,
Father-land :
Syenite hard,
Weary lot,
Callous hand,
All forgot :
Hammers pound,
Ringing round ;
Rise the heaps,
To his voice,
Bounds and leaps,
Toise on toise :
Toil is long,
But dear God
Gives us song,
At the end,
Gives us rest :
Toil is best.

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT.

Department of Indian Affairs,
OTTAWA, November, '98.

A Review of Some Recent Fiction.



THE pre-eminent quality of all books of fiction lies in their power to amuse. To help to beguile an idle moment, or to divert us from the heavier mental occupations of our days, is the supreme mission of the novel. And yet the novels that merely amuse have no enduring quality. Our best writers introduce other elements besides pure diversion. To judge from those that are acknowledged as the best we have, the presenting and discussing of social, religious and moral questions comes within the scope of the novel. It is noticeable that the books which take the strongest hold on popular imagination are not the most diverting. Shakespeare wrote to draw audiences to the theatre, and it is quite conceivable that "Much Ado About Nothing" or "The Merry Wives of Windsor" pleased those rude audiences much better than "Othello" or "Hamlet" could do. Yet we to-day are better informed regarding the two latter than the two former, because of some quality quite distinct from mere diversion.

To thoughtful readers, then, the novel presents two phases, its material and its motive or message. As to material, we must bear in mind the conditions under which recent novelists are working. During the many years since the first novel became popular, writers innumerable have exercised their art in this department, with the result that it is becoming more and more difficult to find material for novels that has not been worked over and over again. Mine after mine has become exhausted by this army of gold-seekers. Placer mining is no longer profitable, at least in the old fields, and now it has become necessary either to seek entirely new fields, or to delve deep down and with great labor and wearisome searching to find some store of the precious metal. Rider Haggard goes to the wilds of Africa and South America, or to Iceland, for his material; Kipling to far-off India with its heathenish customs and stirring, strange life; Crawford to Italy; Ian Maclaren, Barrie, and Crockett to the peasantry of Scotland; Anthony Hope to some fabulous island in the Mediterranean or some equally fabulous kingdom in the heart of Europe. On the other hand, Hardy seeks his material among the unheroic of the lower and middle classes of England, probing their wounds and cauterizing their sores with the cruel fidelity of a surgeon. Hall Caine deals with life and its mysteries as it appears to the native Manxman.

The second consideration with respect to choice of material is that the novelist must suit the every-varying taste of the times. When Scott began to write his famous series, he had almost to create a taste for his books. But the novelist of to-day finds a more or less refined and educated palate to which he must accommodate his wares. He cannot copy after his predecessor, for he must write for his own age. "The rude man," quotes Carlyle, "needs only to see something going on. The man of more refinement must be made to feel. The man of complete refinement must be made to reflect." To the rude man, who desires only to see something going on, the drama, and that of the roystering and hilarious comedy type, addresses itself with peculiar fitness. Dramatic production is almost a thing of the past, which would go to show that as readers we have reached the stage of more or of even complete refinement. The writings of one of the great poets of this age are addressed to the reflective quality, to the subordination of the purely emotional. Browning's poetry, with its keen and subtle analysis of character and motive, requires the exercise of the reflective faculty for its proper appreciation and understanding. If poetry, hitherto held to be the region of pure emotion, has so surrendered to the domination of the intellect, what may we expect of prose fiction? So we find some of the best novels a close and careful study of social and economic conditions, or an analysis of the secret motives that possess the human heart. I refer now not to the purpose novel, such as Bellamy's "Looking Backward," or Mrs. Humphrey Ward's "Robert Elsmere;" but rather to such books as George Eliot's "Romola," or Hall Caine's "Christian."

The second part of our study will be devoted to the message which is conveyed through the novel of to-day. The word "message" appears perhaps too dignified and sacred a term to be applied to the novel, and should be applied, one would think, rather to the utterance of the prophet or the preacher. Yet I do not think we shall be far astray if we regard the novelists as minor prophets, some of them false possibly, or lacking in courage to utter what lies within them. The man who writes books for the public is, in his private capacity, not much wiser or more far-seeing than one who never writes. But when he writes he is, or should be, under inspiration. At the least, he is, as it were, under oath, and dare not utter things inadvisedly and without duly pondering upon the truth of his utterance. In his essay on Scott, Carlyle speaks of this message: "In the heart of the speaker there ought to be some kind of gospel-tidings. . . . Literature has other aims than harmlessly amusing indolent languid men." He further

suggests that all literature worthy of the name is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up and elevating." In the following we may find something of those qualities of which Carlyle speaks.

The extreme type of Thomas Hardy's novels is found in "Jude the Obscure." Jude Fawley from early boyhood was possessed of an ambition for college education, leading toward the Church as a profession. He pursues his purpose unfalteringly through the years of his boyhood and youth. He buys Latin and Greek grammars, and while he drives a bread-cart he picks up some smattering of the classics. His plans are well laid. Being dependent upon his own exertions, he chooses the occupation of stone-cutter as one most likely to afford him employment in the city of colleges. To Oxford, after long years of waiting, he wends his way. Here he will finally succeed or fail. In conjunction with, or rather we should say against, his intellectual longings, Jude has to fight, of outward circumstances, poverty and social traditions; and inwardly an appetite for strong drink and the animal passion of sex. The theme therefore resolves itself into a conflict between the mind and spirit striving upward, and the world and the flesh dragging and keeping him down. Shall the powers of darkness or the powers of light gain possession of him? Or to state it more to the purpose, shall the man succeed in establishing himself in the innate dignity of his manhood, or must he give up the fight and confess at last that the stars fought against him? From this viewpoint, the message of this book is one of discouragement. He not only fails to make a scholar and a bishop of himself; he fails even to preserve his native manliness and integrity. After giving up his university plans, he drifts into drunkenness, debauchery and bestiality, and dies in the prime of life, alone, calling for a cup of water to slake his dying thirst, while his coarse, brutal wife has left his side for an hour to enjoy the gay scene of a holiday exhibition.

The foregoing is only a bare outline of the story. There is a great deal more in it of an equally depressing nature. It belongs to what has been styled the "literature of despair." Jude marries one woman, divorces her, and lives with another whom he has not married. His life with the former is wretched, with the second fairly happy. This one he loves and continues to love, evidently because he has not married her and sworn to love. The inference is plain. There is a suggestion of paganism in the author's reference to a good old Anglican church as a "temple to the Christian divinities."

Realism, sensualism and pessimism are the principal notes struck

in this book,—all notes of despair, for his realism paints the darker shades of human life and character; his sensualism confesses that the animal in man is still superior to the mind; and his pessimism declares that circumstance, fate, or what you will, is still stronger than human skill or human endeavor.

It must be admitted that the sensualism of the book is offensive. True, sensualism is the theme; but it need not have been made so shockingly prominent. While Jude is preparing for college, he accidentally meets a young girl, whom he soon marries. Here is the description of the girl: "She was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin's egg. She was a complete and substantial female human, no more, no less." These are illustrations that can be quoted; others, more direct and much more gross, I refrain from citing.

The realism is equally prominent with the sensualism. Arabella Donn, Jude's wife to be, scrapes an acquaintance with him by throwing a piece of pig's offal at him. Their intimacy receives a considerable impetus while the two, a short time later, chase a pig that has escaped from Arabella's guardianship. When they marry, a source of income is hoped for from a pig which they fatten during the autumn. The killing of this pig is the theme of one chapter, and the author shows a master's skill in elevating this ignoble scene into the domain of the tragic, and making it a factor in the disagreement that finally separates husband and wife. The boiling of the water, the catching of the pig, hoisting him on his back, scraping off the bristles, plunging in the knife, and the attendant squealing of the unhappy victim, all are depicted with studious attention to details.

After Jude had been some time at Oxford, battling with all sorts of discouragements, he wrote letters to the heads of various colleges in that city, stating his difficulties and asking their advice. He received one reply, as follows: "I have read your letter with interest; and, judging from your description of yourself as a workingman I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade, than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do." On the strength of this "terribly sensible advice," Jude got drunk.

This selection and presentation of the discouraging elements in the common unidealized life of humanity is what constitutes the

pessimism of Thomas Hardy's novels. It is easy to see how a more sanguine writer would conduct his hero over the same obstacles to a triumphant success. That the hero admits the truth of the advice, and is consequently discouraged and debased, is in keeping with the tone of the whole book.

As was said before, "Jude" is the extreme type of Hardy's novels. All of his books contain elements of great beauty. The picture of



dairy farm life in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" is idyllic. His "Woodlanders" is enchantingly beautiful in its description of woodland scenery. In "Jude" the reader is impressed with the conviction that here is a writer whose sympathies have gone out to the unlucky and unheroic of humanity. Stripped of its indecent coarseness, this novel treats boldly and frankly certain social evils. Taken at its best, the purpose of the book is indicated in the following speech delivered by Jude in the streets of Oxford: "It is a difficult

question, my friends, for any young man—that question I had to grapple with, and which thousands are weighing at the present moment in these uprising times—whether to follow uncritically the track he finds himself in, without considering his aptness for it, or to consider what his aptness or bent may be, and re-shape his course accordingly. I tried to do the latter, and I failed. But I don't admit that my failure proved my course to be a wrong one, or that my success would have made it a right one; though that is how we appraise such attempts nowadays—I mean, not by their essential soundness, but by their accidental outcomes. If I had ended by becoming like one of these gentlemen in red and black that we saw dropping in here by now, everybody would have said, 'See how wise that young man was to follow the bent of his nature!' But having ended no better than I began, they say: 'See what a fool that fellow was in following a freak of his fancy.'

"However, it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten. It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one; and my impulses—affections—vices, perhaps, they should be called—were too strong not to hamper a man without advantages, who should be as cold-blooded as a fish and as selfish as a pig to have a really good chance of being one of his country's worthies."

"Simon Dale," by Anthony Hope, is in tone and purpose quite the opposite to "Jude." Jude determines to be a bishop, no less, and his determination, if nothing else, should fortify him in his virtue. Simon Dale is a young man of no particular pretensions to virtue, living in the dissolute times of Charles II. Jude's virtue is attacked by a coarse and ignorant country wench—and he succumbs. Simon comes within the allurements of the most fascinating woman of her time—the notorious Nell Gwyn. What enables him in the moment of supreme temptation to resist the siren is simply the love he bears a pure and queenly maiden, near whose room he passes and whose voice he hears singing a low love-song. And that love which keeps him pure enables him to act the man. This is a spiritualizing love, which manifests itself as often in Anthony Hope's novels as does a sensual passion in Hardy's. Respectively, these two sentiments form the *motifs* of the two authors.

Barbara Quinton and Simon Dale had spent their childhood and youth together in their country house at Hatchstead. She had gone to London as Maid of Honor; he to seek his fortune at the court. King Louis of France was visiting Charles at Dover, and during this visit the infamous Treaty of Dover was enacted. As an incidental

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